

Free, MDE-approved online professional development courses now available for enrollment

LANSING, MI — *Michigan Virtual*TM is partnering with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to offer educators free online and blended professional development opportunities.

Through this collaboration, the two organizations aim to provide statewide training in a way that is respectful of both the time and budgets of local and intermediate school districts and educational organizations. By leveraging the expertise of subject-matter experts at MDE, *Michigan Virtual* is creating a series of free courses that inform instructors about the latest educational policies and research.

The first two courses in the series — [Assessment Security](#) and [Seclusion and Restraint Awareness Training](#) — are now available for enrollment. Other courses currently in development include training on social/emotional learning, formative assessment and gifted and talented education.

The vision is to implement evidence-based practices in schools that improve conditions for students. The two assessment courses, for example, will help educators create equitable testing environments. The other courses will help educators meet the MDE's "Top 10 in 10" challenge to support the whole child by addressing their physical, behavioral and emotional needs.

Both partners want to alleviate tensions around limited resources. Most school districts are doing anything and everything they can to offer professional development to their instructors; however, limited resources make this task a challenging one.

Tamara Bashore-Berg — the executive director of professional learning services at *Michigan Virtual* and liaison between the two organizations — has no illusions that there are situations in which face-to-face delivery models are preferable to virtual learning models. She explains, however, that online professional development courses can help school districts and educational organizations save resources and choose their battles.

The online courses in this series build awareness and provide fundamental training

on topics critical to student safety and success. With the basics covered, local and intermediate school districts can free up resources to utilize their coaches and trainers for higher-level training.

For educators who are geographically isolated, online courses can reduce travel costs for professional development. “We have teachers in the Upper Peninsula who do not have an ISD that can provide training for them,” says Bashore-Berg. “If they don’t have to come down to the Lower Peninsula for PD, they can save several hundred dollars annually.”

For certain topics, online courses can also structure content in a manner more conducive to adult learning. Rather than relying on a “sit and get” model for professional development — in which educators are given all materials and activities in a marathon course of several hours — online models allow instructors to access content at their own pace and convenience.

Research suggests that adult learners do not always learn best in “sit and get” settings. Usually, they learn in increments and then try putting lessons learned into practice. For some topics, “one and done” models might be effective. For others, it might make more sense to have a series of intervention strategies.

Before starting work on these courses, *Michigan Virtual* began collaborating with the MDE and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) to support Michigan’s Early Literacy Task Force. This task force convenes monthly to address the state’s most pressing literacy issues, including Michigan’s ranking as 41st among U.S. states in 4th-grade reading scores and the fact that — according to 2015 M-STEP data — less than 50 percent of Michigan 3rd graders are proficient readers.

These alarming statistics have generated momentum for a sea change in state Pre-K to 3rd-grade literacy efforts. As part of this initiative, *Michigan Virtual* is creating free online training modules for Pre-K-3 teachers and administrators. Additionally, [EduPaths](#) — another online professional development provider for Michigan educators — has created a series of free online training modules for literacy coaches.

Currently, [six free modules for K-3 teachers and two free modules for Pre-K teachers](#) are available for enrollment. Modules will continue to be added throughout 2018, including a series of free schoolwide literacy modules for administrators. After completing each module, instructors will receive SCECHs at no cost.

The potential for online learning to provide free and openly-accessible training opportunities is vast. Ultimately, the goal should be: How can educators use online

professional development to move the needle forward in student achievement?

More information on the courses created out of MDE's partnership with *Michigan Virtual*, including registration information, can be found at the following link:

<https://michiganvirtual.org/professionals/mde/>